Volume II.
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Week of
October 13, 1941

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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†"All Men Are Alike" opened Monday, October 6th, at the Hudson Theatre.
†"Anne of England" opened Tuesday, October 7th, at the St. James Theatre.
†"Viva OBrien" opened Thursday, October 9th, at the Majestic Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
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NEW YORK TIMES
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NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

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"Viva O'Brien"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *October 10, 1941*

"Viva O'Brien" Has Handsome Setting, Nice Score, No Wit

"Viva O'Brien," musical comedy by William K. and Eleanor Wells; music by Maria Grever; lyrics by Raymond Leveen. Produced by Hickey, Hale and Robinson at the Majestic Theatre, New York, Oct. 9, 1941.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IF I can ever get my School for Broadway Angels started I shall offer a scholarship to the gentleman, or gentlemen, who have spent close to $100,000 staging "Viva O'Brien" at the Majestic Theatre and have everything to show for it but a salable entertainment.

Here are crowds of pretty girls lightly draped with rich and rare costumes, stage room covered with expensive and rather attractive scenery, a score that is pleasantly unhackneyed and notably melodious, a practical water tank into which Olympic Champion Pete Desjardins dives almost as thrillingly as he did at the World's Fair Aquacade, and a Chester Hale ballet that dances itself through waves of applause.

But here, alas, is also one of the stupidest books in all Broadway history handicapping a badly assorted cast of principals.

What can we do about that? Nothing I know of except to issue the customary warning, coupled with an admission that, bad as it is, "Viva O'Brien" is visually still a lot of show for anything under $2.20.

Enter Mme. Grever

The new and outstanding personality of the production appears to be Maria Grever who wrote the music. Mme. Grever is a Spanish lady of a long and luminous line of Castilian somebodies. She is also the composer of a piece called "Ti-pi-tin," according to the record, and this has returned her large sums in ASCAP royalties.

Her dance numbers are lively and original and I suspect you will be hearing a good deal from her songs, "Wrap Me in Your Serape," "Mood of the Moment" and "To Prove My Love" during the Winter.

The production of "Viva O'Brien" came about, I have been told, through Mme. Grever's assembling of the score and her natural desire that something should be done with it. A member of her Cleveland law firm agreed and, being in close touch with a lot of money that might otherwise be frittered away in taxes, decided to get it into circulation via the stage.

The complete fulfillment of this ambition, I feel certain, will ultimately be realized.

"Viva O'Brien" revolves about the adventure of a research party in Mexico, the discovery of a wishing stone at a sacred pool in the depths of Yucatan and a couple of quick flights through jungles of Chester Hale girls.

Russ Brown is the chief comedian and manages the collection of scattered laughs, notably in one scene when he has the help of Tony Labriola.

Numerous Cast

There are two comely prima donnas, Ruth Clayton and Marie Nash, a mildly exotic singing girl named Victoria Cordova and a tenor of good voice, Milton Watson.

Harold, Hugh and Tom Diamond are knockabouts from burlesque and act the part. Diver Desjardins is assisted by Roy Twardy, a water clown, and Betty O'Rourke. John Cherry and Anne Dere manage to preserve a sort of dignified legitimacy in the confusion.

The chief contributors to the show's virtues, however, are Clark Robinson, who did the designing of the sets, John M. Booth, Jr., who designed the costumes and the Century company, which has done particularly well with the lighting. Chester Hale's dance arrangements are a professional note in Robert Milton's uninspired direction.

There was a large addience at the Majestic last night, and it was both friendly and encouraging. An old Spanish custom.

'VIVA O'BRIEN'

A musical comedy in two acts; book by William K. Wells and Eleanor Wells; music by Maria Grever; lyrics by Raymond Leveen; directed by Robert Milton; designed by Clark Robinson; dances by Chester Hale; costumes by John N. Booth Jr.; presented at the Majestic Theater on October 9, 1941, by Hickey, Hale and Robinson. The cast:

Jeeves	Cyril Smith
Emilio Morales	Milton Watson
Betty Dayton	Ruth Clayton
Manuel Estrada	Roberto Bernadi
Lupita Estrada	Victoria Cordova
Tom	Harold Diamond
Dick	Hugh Diamond
Harry	Tom Diamond
J. Foster Adams	Edgar Mason
Professor Sherwood	John Cherry
Mrs. Sherwood	Ann Dere
Senora Estrada	Adelina Roatina
Pedro Gonzales	Gil Galvan
Don Jose O'Brien	Russ Brown
Carol Sherwood	Marie Nash
Gateman	Hugh Diamond
Maria	Mara Lopez
Dolores	Tanya Knight
Ramon	Rudy Williams
Juan	Joe Frederic
Native Carrier	Pete Desjardins
Zambrano	James Phillips
Vicente, a Matador	Gil Galvan
Rani	Tony (Oswald) Labriola
Ship's First Officer	Cyril Smith
Secretary of Mexican Consulate	Terry La Franconi
The Divers	Pete Desjardins, Ray Twardy, Betty O'Rourke

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *October 10, 1941*

'Viva O'Brien!' Adds Swimming Pool to the Usual Comforts of Musical Comedy

By BROOKS ATKINSON

DON'T look now, but the aqua-musical that opened at the Majestic last evening is "Viva O'Brien." It is one of the strangest experiences offered on Broadway for some time. Produced at a reputed cost of $80,000, which is certainly folding money, it includes all the familiar accoutrements of musical comedy with the addition of a swimming pool, nine feet deep, according to the press agent's soundings. "Familiar" is a word used advisedly here. For "Viva O'Brien" makes remarkably free use of clichés that were discarded from musical comedy before any of its chorus girls were born.

It looks like a musical comedy, for all of the costumes are expensive and many of them are handsome. Occasionally, it sounds like a musical comedy, particularly when Maria Grever, composer of "Ti-pi-tin," is writing in the conventional rhythm of Spanish-American music. But the plot, dialogue, humorous interpolations and the production ideas are like imitations of the nightmares of a retired showman.

• • •

Some of the sidewalk historians were saying last evening that all musical comedies in the old days were like this. As soon as the authors have collected the characters at cocktail hour on an economic royalist's estate in Miami, they are packed off to Mexico and then on to Yucatan to find a sacred wishing stone in the Mayan jungle. This provides a place for a solemn ritual dance and a big water-falls production number with some pretty gaudy subsidiary effects. If you remember "Digga-digga-do" more than a decade ago you can visualize "Yucatana," which is the same idea in jungle attire with the patient chorus waving their arms and anything else that is necessary.

• • •

A big musical production like "Viva O'Brien" represents a lot of hard work and high hopes. Russ Brown, who is a good-natured performer, ploughs loyally through the morass of the book, tossing dull jokes over his shoulder. All the principals and boys and girls work and smile with the traditional gallantry of show business. No playgoer can help being won by the good spirit of theatre performers. But it is love's labor lost in the case of "Viva O'Brien." The willessness of the book, the routine of the music, the stuffy production ideas are too ponderous for performers to translate into entertainment. A few moments of Tony Labriola's languid fooling are amusing and the cameo diving show is pleasant toward the finale. But "They Shoulda Said No" would be a suitable subtitle for "Viva O'Brien." The theatre cannot go through all that shopworn material again.

"Viva O'Brien"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *October 10, 1941*

Viva O'Brien, Aquamusical, Opens at the Majestic

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH the characters in Viva O'Brien were able last night to get out of any place they did not like merely by making a wish and touching a magic stone, some of us out in front were not so fortunate. It was not that we had no desire to travel. All of our Joad impulses were screaming to us, demanding a change of scene. Yet, having a job to do, and not owning any magic stone to touch, we just had to stay put at the Majestic.

We made our wishes all right. We kept thinking of other places where we would rather be. As a matter of fact, even after two hours of almost undisturbed contemplation, we could hardly think of any other place where we would not rather have been. Denied direct contact with such a travel agent as that magic rock, we even rubbed our feet on the carpet, hoping against hope that it might prove vehicular in its oriental way. But, alas, it did not. Viva O'Brien was before us. Wishes alone could not move it or us. There was nothing else for us to do but to bear it, even if we could not grin.

Now Viva O'Brien is what its producers choose to identify as an "aquamusical." In plain English this proves to mean that it is a musical comedy boasting a swimming pool which is wet and a book which is wetter.

* * *

It is one of those itinerant affairs that moves from Miami Beach, by an airplane which never leaves the ground, to Mexico, and then reaches a sacred pool in Yucatan (where the magic stone is found) before journeying at random to the Floating Gardens at Xochimilco, the Plaza Del Toros in Mexico City and by slow degrees back to Miami Beach.

Despite its geographical restlessness there never was a duller cruise than the one upon which Viva O'Brien embarks. The costumes encountered on the way are sometimes pretty. Two of the dance numbers are fair enough and the settings are elaborate. The whole thing must have cost money. Even so, this money might just as well have been poured down a rathole as to have been tossed into that onstage swimming pool and what surrounds it.

At the evening's very end when you could swear that it is time for your breakfast orange juice and coffee, Pete Desjardins and Ray Twardy do perform one truly exciting double dive. But as the book has been diving ever since the curtain went up (indeed, has gone down for the third time by the end of the first half hour), it is much too late to call out the life guards.

* * *

Although there is one scene in which to suggest a waterfall several thousand pounds of sugar are tossed over a seamed curtain the poundage of this falling sugar is as nothing compared to the tonnage of the sour jokes and deliquescent wheezes which are dropped on the stage during an excruciating evening.

Russ Brown, who is nothing if not stalwart, applies himself industriously to doing all the dull and foolish things he has been given to do as the hero with mixed Latin and Irish blood who goes searching for silver and the magic stone. The others are no less laborious and no more inspired.

I used to think the Ritz Brothers were the threesome who subtracted more copiously from my pleasure than any other family performers. That, however, was before I had seen the three Diamonds last night. From now on so far as regrettable brotherhoods go they head my list even as Viva O'Brien heads my list of musicals I would like to forget. Its saga of a rolling stone is one that gathers plenty of remorse. It will win us no Good Neighbors, and itself few friends.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *October 10, 1941*

'Viva O'Brien' Opens at Majestic Theatre

Musical Show With Real Pool on Stage Concerns Quest for 'Wishing Stone'

By JOHN ANDERSON

WHEN the producers of "Viva O'Brien" called their show an "aquamusical" at the Majestic last night they did so because there is a real pool on the stage for some fancy divers to cut into now and then. But that is not the only aquatic feature of a damp evening which also has water on the plot, leaky dialogue, a bilgy book, soggy songs, and fog in the fun. By the time the last splash had settled tardily to the stage it was obvious that "Viva O'Brien" was an irrigated bore.

Its alleged kinship to Billy Rose's celebrated dunkery on Flushing Meadows is so remote as to be practically non-existent. The best you could call it would be an eye-dropper version of that great spectacle. But while Pete Desjardins, Ray Twardy and Betty O'Rourke do a few attractive stunts in the small tank, the evening's greatest diving was for hats.

It seemed a sorry waste of opportunity to get an old-fashioned claptrap musical comedy such as this one is on the very brink of a pool of water and then not push the darned thing in, carefully weighted with its own sinkable foolishness. I doubt if even in drowning it could emit anything as light as a gurgled bubble with its last breath.

Double Love Story

No one, of course, cares how preposterous the book for a musical comedy is if it is interesting or imaginative. Here William K. Wells and Eleanor Wells have set down a collection of episodes that are not only incredibly silly, but ruinously dull. They begin in Miami with a scientist setting out to find the famous Wishing Stone, supposed to be held by natives in Yucatan, and involve a double love story—the scientist's daughter with the Mexican owner of a silverless silver mine, and a Mexican senorita with a rough and ready hero, part Irish and part Spanish name, oddly enough, Don Jose O'Brien.

They find the stone in the bottom of a pool beside a tall waterfall, guarded by the angry tribe, and Mr. Desjardins dives neatly and swipes it. Thereafter anybody holding it got a wish, and if I'd been able to grab it a moment I'd have been home hours ago.

The idiotic love stories wind around the usual misunderstandings and spotlight duets to a happy ending which was at least unconventional enough to show Mr. Desjardins back in Miami embracing a diving tank in his outstretched arms. But even that was nothing to the passionate embrace I gave an eastbound taxicab.

Though scenery is piled up on the stage there is nothing very attractive about it and the players seem lamentably uninteresting. Even the likeable Russ Brown in the title part is hopelessly defeated by material that is no better than a taffy pull. He has one amusing scene with Tony Labriola that is good fooling. Hugh, Tom and Edgar Diamond perform some knockabout clowning and while they work hard and fall down a good deal, the sound is deadened by the louder thud of their jokes.

Milton Watson, Victoria Cordova and Marie Nash take care of the singing, though the only piece that seemed listenable, if also reminiscent, was "Mood of the Moment." Even the dance routines seemed tiresome and pokey.

There was a noble speech at the end about our star-spangled friendship for Mexico, and as one anxious to preserve the good will of our good neighbors I pray that "Viva O'Brien" never gets south of the border.

On second thought I think I'll pray that it does.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 10, 1941

One Viva O'Brien Takes a Dive

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE season advances and I'm beginning to wonder whether I was hired to review plays or cover murders.

Last night's affair was a particularly brutal and bloody one, this time in the musical line. I don't believe there has been anything that cost so much and went so sour since the Bradley Martin ball. Everything that could add to the general debacle was apparently tracked down by specially hired scouts and immediately commandeered. The whole thing was incredibly dull, banal and fatuous.

Billed as an "aquamusical," *Viva O'Brien* evidently hoped that by having a real swimming pool on the stage, as well as a 30-foot cascade down which flowed tons of granulated sugar, its general dreadfulness would not matter. The swimming pool and the sugarfall are doubtless on the plus side, but no match for the minus and, as a matter of fact, much less spectacular than they might have been if there had never been an Aquacade.

As for the rest, one need only say that the plot has to do with a search for a wishing stone deep in the Yucatan jungles; that the gags are not only ancient and awful but actually repeated at intervals; that the music is largely commonplace, and also repeated at intervals; that one of the chief sources of laughter is an absent-minded professor; that the ingenue is stiff and no songstress; and that, in this year of 1941, the big dance number is a voodoo ballet.

One or two of the other dance numbers are fairly pleasing, however, and around 11 o'clock the swimming pool was finally put to use for some expert diving. The well known Pete Desjardins did some fine double jackknives, and in a "man-and-horse" combination, he and Ray Twardy took a really great dive.

But *Viva O'Brien* took a greater one.

"Viva O'Brien"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *October 10, 1941*

"Viva O'Brien!" an Aquamusical, Overflows at the Majestic

By WILELLA WALDORF

"VIVA O'BRIEN!" described in the program as an acquamusical, opened last night at the Majestic Theatre. The aqua lurked in a tank at the rear of the stage throughout the performance, leaving precious little room for the Chester Hale girls to cavort in, and was used but sparingly until around eleven o'clock when Pete Desjardins, the Olympic diving champion, assisted by Ray Twardy, an aquatic comedian, and Betty O'Rourke, a watersprite, put on a miniature Aquacade that woke up those of the audience who had not gone home after the intermission.

It was a good finale, but what went before was one of the most childishly trying musical shows this reviewer has sat through in a long time. We do not mean to suggest that the producers have aped George Abbott and hired only kiddies for their puerile romp. Far from it. Everybody in "Viva O'Brien!" appears to be grown up, and the writers of the book must be old enough to know better.

The jokes themselves are for the most part pathetically senile, and it is depressing to hear them fall with a dull thud that, like everything else in "Viva O'Brien!" was amplified.

Incidentally, this is the first musical we recall in quite a spell that reprises its jokes. After a particularly limp exchange of pleasantries on the part of two members of the company, we would heave a sigh and mutter: "Well, anyway, that's over."

But we are wrong. It isn't over. It keeps coming up again at intervals all evening.

Rather late in the second act three comedians dressed as sailors—the Diamond Boys, they must have been—came out and did one of those dear old Joe Cook seltzer-bottle numbers, on a small scale.

Where is Joe Cook these days, does anybody know? Dave Chasen, we understand, is running a highly successful restaurant in Hollywood.

Well, to get back to "Viva O'Brien!" the Chester Hale girls worked very hard and so did a Mexican dancer named Gil Galvan. Come to think of it, nearly everybody worked hard. But to no avail.

"Viva O'Brien!" is a Latin-American aquamusical. You could tell the Latins from the Americans very easily. The Latins called Mexico "Mehico," while the Americans called it "Mexico."

The songs, some of them, might have sounded better in other surroundings, but the amplification was a bad idea. "Mood of the Moment," apparently the theme song of the evening, was reprised almost as much as some of the jokes.

During a big, scarey voodoo number, a waterfall made of shivering cloth and rippling lights suddenly turned into a torrent of water. Not real water, though. Sugar. Thousands of pounds of sugar, they say it was. The real water, remember, was in the tank into which Mr. Desjardins and his aides dove so expertly.

This struck us as a tremendous waste of good sugar in times like these.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *October 10, 1941*

'Viva O'Brien,' an 'Aquamusical,' Opens at the Majestic Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"VIVA O'BRIEN," an "aquamusical" which opened at the Majestic Theater last evening, must have cost a lot of money to put on. Probably it was expensive to hollow out a portion of the Majestic's stage and fill it with water in these days of drought. No doubt yards of expensive material were required for the wrapping, insubstantial as it sometimes is, of the numerous pretty girls employed by the management. The divers who jump into the pool probably get handsome salaries, and certainly deserve them.

This department, which seeks always to adopt a tolerant attitude toward the theater's misdemeanors, would like to be able to think of some justification for this expenditure. This department has dutifully racked his brain to this end and has come up with one or two pegs on which favorable comment may conceivably be hung. At the end of "Viva O'Brien," Pete Desjardins does some of the amazing dives he used to do for Billy Rose, and Ray Twardy does some of his comic, expert flounders off the diving board. The minutes between 11:05 and 11:10 are thus made endurable. "Viva O'Brien" begins around 8:30.

Before the arrival of Mr. Desjardins and company, the authors of "Viva O'Brien" tell a palsied story about some people who went to Yucatan and found a wishing stone, the possession of which allowed them to leave Yucatan immediately and land in Mexico. In Yucatan the natives danced to the music of tom-toms. In Mexico the hero, one O'Brien, almost had to fight a bull. On the way back the wife of a professor who was always losing his glasses in embarrassing places fell off a cruise ship.

That, plus two love affairs, is the story, and in a long, sometimes harrowing, experience of musical comedy plots I cannot remember a worse. Its quality is matched by the music of Maria Grever and the lyrics of Raymond Leveen. The humor, a truly ghastly business, is presumably to be charged to the book writers, William K. and Eleanor Wells. Chester Hale has seen to it that the dances are excruciatingly routine and Clark Robinson and John N. Booth, Jr., working on sets and costumes, have achieved some really remarkably lapses of taste. Among the players, Russ Brown, the Diamonds and several others must, I fear, be named jointly in this indictment.

"Viva O'Brien" would have to be seen to be believed. This department does not, it may hastily be added, recommend so drastic a course.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *October 10, 1941*

Bring on the Divers!

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF THE wishing stone, which, according to what passes for a plot in "Viva O'Brien," permits its possessor to whisk himself out of unpleasant predicaments, had just been handed to this reviewer some time during the course of the new "aquamusical," I'll give you one guess as to how he would have availed himself of it. This lavish but incredibly feeble girl-and-music show is called an "aquamusical" because in the last scene a swimming pool is revealed and there is some diving into it. The divers are talented and interesting, and for the ten minutes or so that they are performing, "Viva O'Brien" takes a trace of interest. For the rest of the time, though, everything is terrible.

• • •

There is a plot. It all takes place in Miami and Yucatan, and a party of comic scientists is seeking the mysterious wishing stone and one of the group is a fellow called Don Jose O'Brien. It seems that he is half Irish and half Spanish and that on his father's side he is a coward and on his mother's side a brave fellow. At one point it appears that he is going to have to fight a bull. Then the swimming pool is brought out and happily the plot is tossed into it with the divers. There are also some characters that are always falling in love and having misunderstandings, and everybody runs about and tedium and apathy reign in consort.

• • •

There are jokes. A lot of fun is had by all save the audience when one of the comics mistakes "ore" for "or." When he is told that the worth of his mine can be determined by the value of the silver ore, he hilariously asks: "Silver or what?" You could have heard a critic drop. Then, when another character says he got his suit of clothes catch-as-catch-can, the chief comic replies quick as a flash that it looks as if he got it from an ash can. So do they go on for a couple of acts, the merry rogues and, after you have listened to them for a minute or two you even welcome the songs, which aren't very good. The quality of the score is perhaps illustrated by the fact that one of the numbers is called "Wrap Me in Your Serape."

• • •

There are actors. A fellow billed as Tony (Oswald) Labriola appears late in the second act, and, although I doubt if he is one of the major comics, he almost seems so by contrast. Russ Brown, who has been a serviceable musical comedy player elsewhere, works with the grim desperation that must be heroism as Don Jose O'Brien, but you will have to be a great admirer of good intentions to say that he has any success with his work. Miss Ann Dere, who has hitherto kept out of musical comedies, plays a matron, and has a part which consists of falling out of a boat. The younger women of the cast meet with no such fate, which may conceivably be one of the errors committed by the librettists. The production is costly, and it would have been wise had some of the money been lavished on a good joke or two.

"Anne of England"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *October 8, 1941*

"Anne of England" Produced by Gilbert Miller at the St. James

By WILELLA WALDORF

GILBERT MILLER, who produced "Victoria Regina" with great success a few seasons ago, feels that the time is ripe for another play picturing the life and times of one of Britain's queens. Last night at the St. James Theatre he produced with royal pomp a drama by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden entitled "Anne of England," based on a play by Norman Ginsbury known as "Viceroy Sarah," presented in London's West End several years ago.

Although the reign of Queen Anne was a prosperous, even brilliant, period in the history of England, the Queen herself is generally pictured as a stodgy, rather stupid, woman easily swayed by her favorites. Deeply religious and of a kindly, generous nature, she was apparently only vaguely conscious of the distinguished achievements in the world of Art, Literature and Science that took place while she wore the crown. More interested in the smashing victories of British Armies on the Continent, she nevertheless weakened when torn between two factions of her advisors and signed a peace with Louis XIV that saved that monarch from an embarrassing predicament, and rendered the military triumphs of the Duke of Marlborough largely abortive as far as any lasting effect upon the fortunes of Britain went.

A Negotiated Peace

The authors of "Anne of England," abetted by Mr. Miller, have chosen to portray the years of Anne's reign between 1704 and 1710 as a period similar in some respects to the present era in English history. Casting the brilliant soldier John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and Sarah Churchill, his clever Duchess, in the roles of hero and heroine, they have set up Their Graces as champions of England, Defending the Homeland from the Aggressions of France, saving the Small Countries of Europe, Challenging the Dictatorship of Louis XIV.

The villain and villainess of the piece are Mr. Harley, the wily Tory Secretary of State, and his henchwoman, Abigail Hill (Mrs. Masham), a distant relative and protegee of the Duchess of Marlborough, who worms her way into the Queen's good graces and finally succeeds in displacing the Duchess in royal favor. Harley and Abigail Hill are pictured as leaders of the forces of Appeasement and a Negotiated Peace with France, and in the end they have their way with Her Majesty, as the Marlborough's make a dignified exit from the scene of their former triumphs.

An added fillip is given to this modern slant on the troubles of Good Queen Anne—who was not only unhappy in her court intrigues but also suffered from gout—by the fact that the Churchills are ancestors of Winston Churchill, England's doughty Prime Minister, who cherishes similar sentiments on the subject of Peace-at-any-price.

A Good Cast

The story of this struggle between the Marlboroughs on one side, and Harley and Abigail Hill on the other, for the favor of the Queen and the direction of her foreign policy, is told at the St. James in deliberate, occasionally amusing fashion, without ever rising to any particular stirring dramatic heights. "Anne of England" is a play that is literate and worthy of respect, but it is almost never moving.

Although Flora Robson is an excellent actress, it seemed to us that the role of Sarah Churchill lacked the strength and superlatively clever qualities that must have characterized the parvenu Duchess who rose to dazzling heights in the affairs of Britain, and could hardly have been displaced as easily as she seemed to be at the St. James by a snippet like Abigail Hill. The play suffers from the fact that Sarah, and in a lesser sense, Abigail as well, are less clearly developed as characters than is the Queen herself.

Barbara Everest, who acted the same role abroad, has an opportunity that any actress would jump at and her performance as the royal weekling is a delightful one from beginning to end. Nicely characterized, too, is the Prince Consort played by H. H. Von Twardowski, with that old reliable, Leo G. Carroll, in Harley's elegent wigs and Frederic Worlock a fortright Marlborough. Jessica Tandy as Abigail was good in her more insolent scenes, but her words were not always distinct, last night.

Beautiful to Behold

Mr. Miller has staged the play with regal opulence and presumably authentic decor by Mstislav Dobujinski depicting the Queen's residence in Kensington Palace and Marlborough House. The same designer provided the breath-takingly beautiful costumes. Despite his best endeavors, Mr. Miller is unable to keep the play from dragging, for court life, alas! is apt to be almost as dull on the stage as it is in real life, but "Anne of England," though sluggish, is always handsomely caparisoned.

The presentation of the Marlboroughs as heroic champions of their country's welfare, to be sure, is not borne out by some unfeeling historians, who insist that during that period of power they stripped Good Queen Anne of her riches in ruthless fashion and were always more interested in feathering their own nest than in obeying patriotic impulses.

The modern parallel advanced in "Anne of England," however, is an interesting one, and references to Britain's present stand drew applause from the first-night audience, which was suffocatingly elegant and arrived unfailingly late for each act.

"Anne of England" is no "Victoria Regina," but it has its moments and is always a beautiful thing to see, if something of a strain to listen to on a warm evening.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *October 8, 1941*

Miss Everest Brilliant as Anne of England

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE editors of the Britannica, unlike the editors of Liberty, do not punch the clock for their readers by printing the reading time required by their articles. But in A to Anno (or, if you must, Volume One) of that worthy publication is a biographical sketch of "Anne (1665-1714), queen of Great Britain and Ireland," which takes some 10 or 15 minutes to peruse, whereas the drama called Anne of England, which was presented at the St. James last night, really tells us no more about her and requires two hours and a half to be seen.

Of course, the Britannica's narrative is not written in dialogic form. Of course, such admirable actresses as Flora Robson, Jessica Tandy and Barbara Everest do not shine as stars in A to Anno. Of course, too, Gilbert Miller has not presented the encyclopedia (at least the Britannica) and sprinkled its pages with M. Dobujinsky's elaborate palace settings. Even so, Anne in the Britannica is every bit as exciting as Anne at the St. James. If anything more so, because the facts of her reign are stated there with greater brevity.

Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden have done more than turn to the biographers, long or short. The basis of their play is a drama by Norman Ginsbury which London saw and liked under the title of Viceroy Sarah as far back as 1934, when Miss Everest first gave her fine performance as the queen.

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Since then momentous events have taken place. And Winston Churchill, a descendant of the first great Marlborough whose victories granted glory to Anne's reign, now stands as head and symbol of an England once again in arms. As aware of this change as anyone else, Miss Canfield and Miss Borden have rewritten Viceroy Sarah, trying to make topical its palace intrigues for the domination of a foolish queen: those famous intrigues which were so bitterly conducted at Kensington more than two hundred years ago between Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, and Abigail Hill, that scheming protegee of hers who subsequently displaced her.

Over-anxious to do their bit as propagandists for a good cause, Miss Canfield and Miss Borden not only seek to establish a parallel between the England of John and Winston Churchill's days but proceed to push this parallel around like a hoop in places where it does not belong. The France of Louis XIV serves them as the present-day Germany of Anne's time. Harley, Marlborough's political enemy, is their appeaser. And the war of nerves and fifth columnists are more than hinted at in their dialogue. To be sure, Harley does not carry an umbrella, and neither Queen Anne nor Marlborough quite get around to singing "There'll Always Be an England" (which, praise God, there always will be). But the effects are frequently as disconcerting as if they had.

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With the exception of these misplaced Wookeyisms, Anne of England goes its sedate, slightly soporific way, with all the fire of home-work conscientiously done and none of the passion of drama. It is often beautiful to look at, due to Mr. Dobujinsky's colorful costumes, and the sweep with which he has painted his operatic palace interiors. But it lives more as a still-life than a play.

Miss Everest's Anne is a performance brilliantly planned and executed. She plays her unsparingly, catching all the absurdity of the frumpy, over-dressed little monarch, with her crown awry, and all the pathos of the lonely and broken older woman trying to make great decisions and sipping at her cup of brandy which she prefers to identify as cold tea.

Although she leaves something to be desired, Miss Robson is fascinating to watch as the domineering Sarah who for years was such an intimate at Court that she was "Mrs. Freeman" to the Queen's "Mrs. Morley." Miss Tandy is a vision of alabaster loveliness as the coldly calculating Abigail Hill, and plays her with a skill as unobstrusive as it is genuine. And H. H. von Twardowski, as George, Anne's Consort, excellently captures the comedy of one of the script's livelier scenes.

If the others—Frederic Worlock as Marlborough and Leo G. Carroll as Mr. Harley, for example—are able to do little, it is because the play gives them so little help. My fear is that as one of Gilbert Miller's excursions into history Anne of England must take its place not beside Victoria Regina of happy memory but by The Patriot, that beautiful Slavic bore of some 15 years back.

"Anne of England"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *October 8, 1941*

'Anne of England,' Historical Drama, Opens at the St. James

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

HISTORY is handsomely dressed in "Anne of England," which opened last evening at the St. James Theater, and moves in stately decorum across the stage. The relations of puttering little Anne with the imperious Duchess of Marlborough and the scheming Mrs. Masham are studied diligently and modern parallels are freely drawn in a good many directions. We are instructed, if only mildly entertained.

Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden have reconstructed the play from the earlier drama of Norman Ginsbury, who, no doubt, pored diligently over the history of the early eighteenth century. He discovered there that Queen Anne and the Duchess were once great friends and had only the good of England at heart. But a devious Secretary of State, Mr. Harley, insinuated Abigail Hill into the Queen's household and Miss Hill, who became Mrs. Masham along the way, undermined the Marlboroughs. The peace party, which the authors identify with modern appeasers, won the day, and their triumph led to the end of the Thirty Years War.

The play is a study of these intrigues, with emphasis heavily on the righteousness of the Marlboroughs. The authors make Harley and others of the peace party villains of the deepest dye and traitors to boot. My own recent readings on the subject—Encyclopedia Britannica, A to Anno—lead me to fear that this is an oversimplification of history. But one needs no outside study to suspect that the authors' parallels between past and present, with Louis XIV's France equalling Hitler's Germany and Marlborough corresponding to his descendant, Churchill, are somewhat forced. They give "Anne of England" contemporary application and also a faint suggestion of historical fraudulence.

But the dramatic faults of the play are distinct from history. "Anne of England" has dignity, but it has little life. Only fitfully does excitement burn through the trappings. For the most part it is prosy stuff, as serious historical drama is so apt to be when it is written in uninspired prose. Miss Canfield and Miss Borden have told a not absorbingly interesting story in routine words and the handsomest wigs in the world will not hide this gloomy fact.

Neither, altogether, will the best acting. "Anne of England" is, by and large, extremely well acted. Barbara Everest, making her first American appearance, gets the feel of life into her portrait of poor, tippling little Anne, flustered, indecisive and behind all her bright jewels almost fascinatingly commonplace. Flora Robson is a fine, appealing Duchess of Marlborough and Frederic Worlock is vigorous Marlborough. Jessica Tandy is quietly venomous as the evil Abigail, and in the costumed cast there are many others to admire. But the play goes on leaden feet.

'ANNE OF ENGLAND'

A play in three acts by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden, based on a play by Norman Ginsbury; directed by Gilbert Miller; designed by Mstislav Dobujinsky; presented at the St. James Theatre, on October 7, 1941, by Mr. Miller. The cast:

Mr. Throstlewaite.....Oswald Marshall
Lady Mary Churchill.....Lisa Inglis
Anne, Lady Sunderland,
Frances Tannehill
Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough,
Flora Robson
John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough.....Frederic Worlock
Footman to the Marlboroughs,
Geoffrey Borden
Lord Godolphin.....Reginald Mason
Abigail Hill.....Jessica Tandy
Mr. Harley.....Leo G. Carroll
Mrs. Danvers.....Margery Maude
Duchess of Somerset.....Cherry Hardy
Captain Vanbrugh,
Anthony Kemble Cooper
Anne, Queen of England,
Barbara Everest
George (the Prince Consort),
H. H. Von Twardowski
Mr. St. John.....Edward Langley
Colonel Parke.....Colin Hunter
Footmen to the Queen,
Thaddeus Suski, Raymond Johnson
Pages to the Queen,
Kenneth Leroy, Jack Leach

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *October 8, 1941*

"Anne of England," Attractively Staged, Acted With Distinction

"Anne of England," drama by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden, based on Norman Ginsbury's "Viceroy Sarah." Produced by Gilbert Miller at the St. James Theatre, New York, Oct. 7, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE players at the St. James Theatre gave a fine, frequently a stirring, performance of "Anne of England" last night, and if it is distinguished acting that draws you to the theatre this engagement should attract you.

Otherwise I fear that Gilbert Miller's production of an adaptation Ethel Borden and Mary Cass Canfield have made of Norman Ginsbury's "Viceroy Sarah" is at this time something of an emotional error.

The play is the story of John Churchill's, the first Duke of Marlborough, defeat at the hands of one of England's least worthy rulers, and this is no time to expect even mixed theatre audiences to become excited over those who failed to do right by Winston's kin.

There was, last night, plenty of willingness to applaud the ancestral Churchill stand for a strong army. His refusal to make peace with France the time Louis XIV was having his turn at trying to establish a new order in Europe was popular. But there was no chance for more than a forced show of friendliness.

Court politics, linked with the machinations of a designing female, brought about the defeat, not only of the Churchills, but of the forces that stood for England's might in the play, and this, I repeat, cannot provide satisfying drama right now.

The play really concerns the fairly trivial court feud that involved Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, and her sly puss of a cousin, Abigail Hill.

Sarah was the girlhood friend and confidant of the kindly but lightly doltish Anne, Queen of England. To strengthen her own hand she brought Cousin Abigail to court and induced Anne to appoint her a lady of the bedchamber.

Abigail, being high-tempered and ambitious, quickly came to resent Sarah's patronizing attitude and threw in her lot with that of Harley, the Secretary of State who was tired of war and wanted peace with France at any price.

Anne sided with the younger Abigail; Sarah was dismissed; her loyal husband, the Duke, resigned his commission in the army and there the play ends, with everybody a little depressed.

Two Hours Later

Of course anybody who goes home and consults his Britannica will be reminded that Anne died shortly afterward, and that the Duke of Marlborough came again into some part of his former power. But that offers no more than a belated satisfaction.

There are two English actress stars—the Flora Robson who played so impressively in "Ladies in Retirement" last season and is now the defeated Duchess of Marlborough, and Barbara Everest, a fine character actress, who has come recently from England to play Anne, a part she created in London.

There was a telling estimate and absorption of character, a taut and true expression of emotion, in both these performances. Sarah all fire and dignity, Anne dumpy and doltish, weak of will, infirm of purpose and addicted to her cold tea—with a shot of brandy in it.

Matching these two in skill and adding a touch of arresting youthful defiance is Jessica Tandy, who plays Abigail with never so much as a suggestion of surrender to power.

The men are ably led by Frederic Worlock as the stanch Marlborough and Leo Carroll as the gently intriguing Harley.

There are short parts well played by Hans von Twardowski, the Prince Consort; Reginald Mason and Anthony Kemble Cooper.

The settings, tall and dark, are by Mstislav Dobujinsky. Mr. Miller directed.

"Anne of England"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *October 8, 1941*

'Anne of England' Opens at St. James

Brilliant Acting of Barbara Everest and Flora Robson Marks Play

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS PRODUCER of "Victoria Regina" and other royal dramas Gilbert Miller knows his way around the peerage, past and present, and we usually feel safe when he sends out to the costumer for the robes, the crown, the scepter and the orb to dazzle us with imperial purple.

Thus his ermine-clad First Nighters felt optimistically at the St. James Theatre last night that in "Anne of England" they would get another fascinating glimpse of history, richly sheltered in palatial settings, dressed within an inch of Mr. Miller's pocketbook and glittering with dialogue as well as diamonds.

It is my sorry duty to report, however, that for all its panoply and parade, its massive sets and brilliant acting, the new play has few scenes that come interestingly to life, to save the evening from overpowering stogginess. It is a sedate, plodding, uninspired fragment of historical drama that Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden have based on another play by Norman Ginsbury and the depressing experience of spending an evening with a weak queen is made worse by spending it with a weaker play.

Anne, in spite of her admitted dullness, takes on a special interest for us these days because of the astonishing parallel between the events of her day and of ours, because England in 1704 was struggling against a European war-lord over-running small nations to seize power for himself, but chiefly because the man whose armies saved England was none other than John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, the son of a Seventeenth Century Winston Churchill, and (surprise! surprise!) ancestor of the present Prime Minister.

All this naturally gives the material an added emphasis and a sharper inflection for present times. In the court intrigue about the foolish, but well-meaning queen, we can hear the ancient counterparts of the appeasers, false patriots and self-seekers working behind Marlborough's back while he was fighting the enemy in words and tones that must echo in his decendant's ears in history's famous and uncomfortable knack of repeating itself.

This ought to make fascinating theatre. It ought to capture a sort of double-dramatic exposure on the ironic tragedy of the play, and heighten its excitement, and send us back into the present haunted by the past.

But the most that the play arouses seems to me a sort of languid curiosity, untouched by either dramatic power or illumination. It tells its story with relentless sobriety. Its seven scenes move solemnly from Marlborough's great victory at Blenheim to that inglorious moment, six years later, when a doddering and deceived monarch takes the treacherous advice of his enemies at court and throws him out.

Across it, in sharpest focus, is the story of the personal duel between the Duchess of Marlborough and her poor relation, Abigail Hill, for the queen's favor. The great and beautiful Sarah got Abigail a place at court only to find that the jealous little wretch wormed herself far enough into the Queen's grace to undo her own benefactor and advance herself. It is a pitiful tale of rankest treachery and back-stairs backbiting, relieved only by the nobility of the Churchills and their followers trying to save England from its own pathetic queen, and her toadying parasites.

Though it is a mean incident it ought to have some luster about it, some excitement and challenge. The characters are all there, some of them admirably drawn, and most of them superbly played, yet they are deadened in their effect—partly by the writing of the play, its reiteration of details, and shifting of scene, and partly by the somewhat ponderous, slow moving production Mr. Miller has given it.

Mr. Dobujinsky's settings are palatial in the grand manner, but they are apparently not easy to move and they are so deep that they are almost cavernous, and since they are without ceilings the actors' voices are frequently lost, or so muffled as to be almost inaudible. This is a serious physical handicap. If the scenes had been simply suggestive and easily changed the whole effect might have been brighter and more coherent.

Certainly the rather dim result is not the fault of the players. With the assistance of the British Government, Mr. Miller succeeded in getting out of London, Barbara Everest, who scored an enormous personal success when the original play was done in London.

As Queen Anne, Miss Everest seems uncannily like not only portraits of the queen, but in gesture and behavior, straight out of the records. She is gently, stubbornly cow-like, silly, and imperious, but essentially good-hearted and stupid. The performance is a beautiful piece of historical recreation and the most interesting part of the production.

Starred with Miss Everest is Flora Robson as the duchess, revealing completely the enormous powers and talent she suggested so vividly in her first appearance here in "Ladies in Retirement." Miss Robson's portrait of the caustic, but lovable and passionately loyal lady is brilliantly sustained, and the play owes its few moments of dramatic force to her towering performance.

Jessica Tandy completes the tangled triangle of feminine intrigue in a sharply defined sketch of Abigail, and there are admirable performances by Frederic Worlock, as Marlborough; Leo G. Carroll, Anthony Kemble Cooper and Reginald Mason, the last the perfect and discreet embodiment of that minister who, said Charles II, was "never in the way and never out of it." H. H. Von Twardowski's amusing and touching portrayal of the sadly futile Consort, deserves special praise as an outstanding, though minor, character.

Yet for all the vitality of a stageful of such performances, the play seems empty of dramatic life, static, and tedious.

All of which is just too bad—but on a magnificent scale.

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM," *October 8, 1941*

Deadly Is the Word For Anne's Parallel

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HAVING once had magnificent success with a play about an English queen, Gilbert Miller can hardly be blamed for wanting to have a go at another. Accordingly last night, with as sumptuous a production as Broadway has seen in several years, he unfolded the story of the last of the Stuarts and of the two women who, during a period of war and crisis, battled for her favor.

No 12-year period in English history was ever packed with more brilliant figures, violent plots, perilous situations and dramatic encounters than the reign of Anne. No more overpowering personality ever breathed than Anne's great favorite, Sarah Duchess of Marlborough. No palace was ever more rife with backstairs conspiracies and seething jealousies than Anne's. All this, certainly, would seem to make for wonderful theater. But the sad truth is that *Anne of England*, despite its royal trappings and its distinguished cast, is a great and hollow bore.

There are several reasons why. To begin with, the events of Anne's reign are both too many and too intricate to boil down into an easily workable play. To set the background, *Anne of England* is forced into reams of exposition, most of it tiresome and not all of it true. Again, the struggle for Anne's favor between the sinuous and finally victorious bed chamber woman, Abigail Masham, and the imperious and finally discomfited "Viceroy Sarah"—which comprises the only action of the play—is a very repetitious kind of conflict that quickly wears thin. The authors have tried to bolster it at the expense of truth, by taking sides—by painting Abigail (who was unscrupulous but ladylike) as a deep-dyed villainess, and Sarah (who was honest but insanely greedy and overbearing) as a heroine. They have even tried to give to this female struggle for royal favor a modern significance, representing the Marlborough contingent as great English patriots during the war against a Hitler-like Louis XIV, and the Masham contingent as a kind of Cliveden set. But this trumped-up parallel only makes a hash of history without doing a thing for the drama.

For—and this is the biggest reason why *Anne of England* fails—it is the work of very ungifted dramatists. They can't make their story build; it merely goes round in circles. They can't *show* something once; they must tell it a dozen times. They seem infatuated with the folderol of royalty, and happiest when they can provide lavish displays of "the grand manner." Worst of all, their dialog is hopelessly commonplace: you would never guess from it that the Duchess of Marlborough had a stinging wit, or the great Duke a consummate suavity.

With the aid of Barbara Everest's brilliantly clever and versatile acting, they do one thing fairly well, however: they put across a characterization of the Queen, of that befuddled and tipsy "Brandy Nan" who was at once a stuborn and indecisive, at once kindly and callous, and who for all her dullness was important because she ruled at a time when the sovereign possessed real power.

As Sarah, Flora Robson is often commanding and always skilful, but the authors have robbed her of the chance of playing the woman as she really was—brilliant, fearless, and incredibly highhanded and insolent toward the Queen. Jessica Tandy played Mrs. Masham with force, besides looking stunning; and Frederic Worlock, Leo G. Carroll, Reginald Mason and H. H. von Twardowski all gave good accounts of themselves.

It might be added that the season's plushiest theatergoers were on hand to pay homage to royalty, and that darn near all of them forgot that punctuality is the courtesy of kings.

"Anne of England"

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *October 8, 1941*

Flora Robson and Barbara Everest Appear in Miller's Production of 'Anne of England'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHAT was "Viceroy Sarah" in England six years ago has become "Anne of England" here. It was produced with purple splendor at the St. James last evening with some actors worth revering. Since Americans are a little backward on fine points of English history, Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden have rewritten the original play of Norman Ginsbury's authorship and an extensive program note provides the historical setting for polite hair-pulling in a palace.

Flora Robson, Jessica Tandy, Barbara Everest and Frederic Worlock blow a little passion into the dramatic scenes. And last evening the royal levy was appropriately held in the presence of a fashionable audience, many of whom were already in their seats when the curtain was tardily raised. But it is to be feared that "Anne of England" is no more galvanic in the theatre than she is in the history books. Despite some brave speeches about England with a topical flavor, this story of Anne is a ponderous one.

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In point of fact, the conflict is between the Duchess of Marlborough and Abigail Hill for influence over the Queen. The Duchess is a stateswoman, wife of England's greatest military leader and the strongest influence in the court. Abigail Hill receives her appointment to the Queen's service through the Duchess's intervention. Once inside the palace doors, Abigail starts to manoeuvre for personal advantage, and finally supplants the Duchess in the Queen's confidence. This feline conflict has far-reaching political consequences. It delivers a weak monarch into the hands of appeasers. When the Duke and Duchess withdraw in the last scene, an aging, crumpled Queen is left in the hands of England's enemies.

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Although palace deportment is doubtless a splendid thing, it is a sore decayer of common drama. The authors of "Anne of England" have done what they could to give the play ordinary vitality. They have attractively drawn the characters of the Duke and Duchess, who are happily in the illustrious Churchill line. They have drawn as many analogies as they can between the times of Queen Anne and King George VI. Every now and then they have managed to bring their central conflict to a point that can be acted in concrete terms of flesh and blood; and when these occasions develop, Mr. Miller's actors take full advantage of them. But the dramatic scenes are deliberate rather than spontaneous. They are tour de force. Most of "Anne of England" is carried around on a golden tray like a glass of water, and the wonder is that so little of it spills over during the evening.

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Mr. Miller has seen his actors well bestowed. Mstislav Dobujinsky has designed the production gorgeously. And there is some acting inside the play that has considerable grandeur. Flora Robson's Duchess of Marlborough is all strength, action and passionate sincerity; and Jessica Tandy's Abigail is the perfect contrast of cool poise and lethal reticence. As Anne of England, Barbara Everest is playing the part she had in the original production—a carefully-wrought portrait of a commonplace Queen disintegrating in spirit and body. Frederic Worlock's decisive, quick-minded, understanding Duke of Marlborough is his best work to date. As a disingenuous politician, Leo G. Carroll is crisply mannered and delightful. H. H. Von Twardowski contributes an amusing and intelligent sketch of the Queen's plump consort. Every one else in the cast behaves like a gentleman or a scoundrel or both, which is not unusual.

But Miss Canfield and Miss Borden have taken the long way around to make a modern drama. After an evening at Queen Anne's court, the life of the middle classes never looked so inviting.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *October 8, 1941*

Royal Portrait

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

QUEEN ANNE of England was a dull old lady who, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, had no interest in the theater of her day. Whereupon, the theater, which has a long and inexorable memory, finally got around to her after all these years and has avenged itself for her neglect of its existence by making her the pallid central character of a pallid chronicle play. Although so warlike a figure as the great Duke of Marlborough stalks through its scenes and the names of such immortal battles as Blenheim, Malplaquet and Oudenarde are tossed liberally into the text, this "Anne of England," which Gilbert Miller has staged with affectionate lavishness, is a feeble, endless and excessively ladylike historical pageant which sets a new season's record for tediousness. Despite an excellent performance by Miss Barbara Everest in the title part, the new play is successful neither as drama nor as history.

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Apparently it is too much to expect any historical play produced in these embattled times to avoid making desperate attempts to suggest modern parallels to its action. In "Anne of England," the efforts are intermittent and rather less successful than usual. There are the customary lyric references to the glory of Britain. Marlborough says something or other about fighting for the rights of small nations. The technique of fifth-columning is contemplated, and the villains are presented as shameless appeasers, who are willing to betray liberty by making a cowardly peace with the aggressor, which happens to be the France of the nearly eighteenth century. It is all utterly ineffectual and has only the effect of making the picture of the Queen and her period seem particularly unpersuasive. For essentially "Anne of England" is just the feeble account of the struggle of two women to dominate the weak, pathetic and dim-witted ruler.

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There was reason for being fearful for "Anne of England" at the start, when Marlborough's daughter and her teacher discuss the European situation of the period in some of the clumsiest expositions to be found in the recent drama. It is the sort of thing in which one character says to another approximately: "As you know, England, Austria and Holland have been fighting France for some years and your father, the Duke of Marlborough, has won some notable victories for Queen Anne, who is the daughter of James II." I don't insist that there is any such actual line in the play, but the whole scene comes pretty close to this type of thing. For the rest of the time, you see the wicked Abigail Hill gradually supplanting the noble Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in the Queen's affections and forcing the celebrated ancestor of Winston Churchill to resign his commission. Obviously it is difficult to write a stirring patriotic play on such a defeatist topic.

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At least, some of the acting is far more effective than the play. Miss Everest, who is making her debut in this country, is an excellent actress who succeeds in making the cloddish, timid but stubborn old queen not only a completely credible figure but also a genuinely pathetic one. Her Anne is an ancient idiot, but in her way she is rather a sweet one. Miss Everest, if not her vehicle, is to be welcomed to the local stage. The excellent Miss Flora Robson is at her best in somewhat sinister roles, and the Duchess of Marlborough is a rather ineffectual person for her to act, but she plays with her customary forthrightness. Miss Jessica Tandy is striking and attractive as the evil and ungrateful girl who is perfectly willing to betray both England and her former friend, the Duchess. There is a good performance by H. H. von Twardowski as Queen Anne's Danish consort, and one family scene between the royal pair is the one engaging episode in the play. Leo G. Carroll, that good actor, isn't at his best as a scheming appeaser. The sets are effective, but "Anne of England" is a ponderous bore.

'ALL MEN ARE ALIKE'

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"

Bobby Clark Loses An Obstacle Race

(Continued from page 278)

had to be caught, and wives that had to be hoodwinked, and jealous Frenchmen that had to be relieved of their revolvers, and British majors that had to be allowed to drool and guffaw—which rather left Bobby sitting in the corner. But it was often not much better when Bobby was advanced to the center of the stage, for he had to deliver lines that were a caution; I suppose it wouldn't have been cricket to swallow them, go up in them, or just quietly leave them out. At any rate, the part helped get him almost as much as the play.

Harry Wagstaff Gribble has directed the show well enough in a boisterous, over-hill, over-dale fashion, but it's too uninspired a farce for the direction to matter. The cast, cursed with bad parts, does little to improve them. Aside from Clark, Ethel Morrison was the only person who ever managed to be at all lively or amusing. But that, really, is not to condemn anything but the play.

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THEATRE REVIEWS

"All Men Are Alike"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *October 7, 1941*

'All Men Are Alike' Opens at the Hudson

Bobby Clark, Agile as Ever in His Comic Doings, Stars in New Farce

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH "All Men Are Alike," according to the title of the new play at the Hudson last night, there is obviously no one in the world like Bobby Clark, star of the farce by Vernon Sylvaine. I know a wonderful editor who looks a little like him, except for the painted-on spectacles and the fact that Bobby has a loose ankle from stomping for cigar-butts. The editor doesn't even smoke.

Undaunted by the fact that he is involved in a cockeyed play that has more doors than it has sense, Mr. Clark rises and shines. He beams. He is radiant. He smiles the innocent leer of Robert the Roue, from Reading, Pa., gallivants around in his long drawers, fizzles over a mess of sibilants in the corner like some maniacle steam radiator, and in costumes that range from kilts and a strip (tease) of carpet to the tidy black of an old lady, he is a sight.

Not since he wore the unforgettable sailor outfit in The Players' revival of "Love for Love" have the town's wardrobes yielded up such daffy apparel.

It was Bobby Clark, I imagine, who invented knee-action. He is the world's only exponent of the crouching strut, a peculiar, but mobile posture, which makes it possible for him to rush on stage while practically sitting down. He can make dull lines hilarious by gurgling them into a cup of coffee. He can, in a moment of exasperation kick his pants up in the air and to his own deadpan astonishment, see them drape themselves neatly by the suspenders on the stair rail. The man's a caution, if not a riot.

Beginning and End

But my delight in the new farce at the Hudson begins and ends with Master Clark. It even wears him down before the evening is over when the long strain of being funny with nothing much to go on seems a heavy burden on the most exhuberant of our comic men.

For Mr. Sylvaine has written a pretty flimsy piece about a London philanderer who goes down to his cottage in Surrey to rest up from the blitz and catch up on his amours, and finds the place over-run with people—his business partner (Mr. Clark), a couple of spies, his lady friend and, unhappily, her jealous husband, a belligerent lad evacuated from the city, a Scots soldier who deserted because they won't let him wear kilts in the army, and an assortment of brass hats from the local military. It's quite a mess of plottage.

Frantic Farce

In a house with eight doors, a chatty housekeeper, a couple of lovely dames (one in pajamas) and two returning and irate wives, the usual farce run around takes place at the end, but frantically. It is the sort of stuff which Mr. Gribble, the director, can usually whip to a fine lather of absurdity with people leaping up and down stairs and out of windows, but the lather at the Hudson wouldn't shave a billiard ball or the downy-faced youngsters in "Best Foot Forward," because, I imagine, the author has provided no soap.

Since the plot is badly scattered the play falls to pieces as it goes along, with Mr. Clark springing happily from piece to piece. The others do what they can to rowdy it up, but they are successful only in small snatches.

Ethel Morrison gets some broad fun out of the housekeeper, and A. P. Kaye provides a fine shouting scene as a practically incoherent major. Reginald Denny returns from the films for his first stage part in twenty years, and if he seems a little stiff it is perhaps because he touched wood in the plot.

Lillian Bond relieves the eye strain as an optically delightful character, and Mr. Gribble, pinch-hits admirably for Eustace Wyatt who, according to a little slip handed to the critics, had a sudden illness.

I hope it wasn't from swallowing any of the dialogue.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *October 7, 1941*

Bobby Clark in "All Men Are Alike," a Farce at the Hudson

By WILELLA WALDORF

"ALL MEN ARE ALIKE," presented last night at the Hudson Theatre, is described in the program as a new farce by Vernon Sylvaine, but it is actually a very old farce of the "Up in Mabel's Room" era laid in England during the present war.

A few uniforms are introduced from time to time, and there is a good deal of chatter about spies looking for the secret formula, but fundamentally this is the same old joke about a couple of gay fellows caught by their wives with two or three halfclad females on the premises. Nearly everybody in the company is undressed at least part of the time, and a great deal of attention is paid to filming lingerie. Traffic up and downstairs to and from the four bedrooms is incessant and there is even at one point the usual excitable Frenchman with a pistol ready to shoot the man who has stolen his wife.

This sort of "I love my wife, but oh you kid!" business is pretty suffocating after the first few minutes, but last night's performance was rendered actually funny in parts by the presence of Bobby Clark in the role of Mr. Popday, a manufacturer of marmalade. (In the wartime absence of oranges, seaweed was being used as a substitute with great success.)

Mr. Popday and his British partner, Mr. Bandle, were heavily involved with women at Mr. Bandle's country house in Surrey, and were likewise afflicted with a Scottish deserter from the army, a terrible child evacuee landed on them for the duration, sundry soldiers, police and spies, and, of course, their wives, who turned up at the worst possible moment in the uniforms of the Women's Army and Navy auxiliary services.

The intricacies of the plot were difficult to follow but had the virtue of giving Mr. Clark a chance to appear in a union suit, a rug with a belt around it, kilts and his wife's uniform. Reginald Denny sported flamboyant pajamas, a hunting outfit and his wife's uniform. Lillian Bond wore a wisp of this and a wisp of that, and Jeraldine Dvorak managed to be fully dressed but spoke with a Mata Hari accent.

One member of the company, Eustace Wyatt, was taken ill shortly before the performance and the director, Harry Wagstaff Gribble, stepped into the part without disturbing the delicate balance of the dialogue.

But it was Bobby Clark's evening. With Reginald Denny, back from Hollywood, acting as "straight man," he went into a series of acts that had the house rocking with laughter. Minus his painted-on spectacles and cane of musical comedy days, Bobby proved that he is a tremendous asset to any show, with or without song cues, and we are now registering a devout hope that a play worthy of his superlative talents will come along without delay. If he can stir things up in a mouldy farce like this one, he ought to be able to tear the roof off in a good, rousing comedy, featuring less lingerie and more wit.

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NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
October 7, 1941

Bobby Clark Loses An Obstacle Race

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

LAST night marked Bobby Clark's first appearance in a non-musical show, and as one of his more ardent admirers, I wish I could refer to the occasion as an event. It was, however, more in the nature of a contest, which can be most quickly described as Bobby Clark vs. All Men Are Alike.

All evening Mr. C. battled his way, in the role of an American, through one of those very English, very silly, very complicated English farces which are full of doors and staircases and cockney accents and Featherstone, Bandle and Popday. All evening he climbed gaily in and out of long woolen underwear and rolled-up rugs and falling kilts and women's skirts. He danced and tripped; he mimicked and sang; he fled and hid; he looked hopefully at blondes and hopelessly at his wife. And in one superb moment, he booted his pants off the floor, making them sail through the air and come down, neatly tethered by their suspenders to the newel post. I don't see how he could ever do that trick twice.

But in the end he lost the fight. He did everything he knew how, but the odds were too great, the obstacles were too many, the plot was too relentless. There were spies that

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"All Men Are Alike"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *October 7, 1941*

'All Men Are Alike' Except Bobby Clark And He Is Unlucky

"All Men Are Alike," farce comedy by Vernon Sylvaine. Produced by Lee Ephraim at the Hudson Theatre, New York, Oct. 6, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU can, being addicted to burlesque, take your fill from a couple of different sources these days without getting so much as a sniff of 42d St.

You can read "The G-String Murders," which Gypsy Rose Lee has written, or edited, for Simon & Schuster, or you can go to the Hudson Theatre and catch Bobby Clark romping about in his underclothes and a floor rug in "All Men Are Alike."

I think Miss Lee and the Essaness boys have a little the better of it. Whether the tale of the plush-lined G-string was written by them and authenticated by Gypsy, or written by Gypsy and checked by the Inner Sanctum, I'm not at all certain. But it certainly gets backstage at Minsky's, and doesn't leave a gag or a bra unturned.

As for Bobby Clark, he dives into "All Men are Alike" with the enthusiasm of one of Billy Rose's Aquacade stars and comes up shaking his torso like a spaniel retrieving sticks from a dirty pool.

Bobby's Great

A great burlesque comedian, this little man with the horned rim specks and the low-gear lope. Even when they assign him a straight part in a scrambled farce he earns forty times as much laughter as his author, and at least four times as much as his bewildered associates lumped together.

"All Men Are Alike" was thrown together by a young Englishman named Vernon Sylvaine who has taken to writing anything he can think of in the hope of getting the minds of Britain's service men and bombed civilians off the war.

To us, unhappily, it is a liability washed up by the war, but in London they laughed at it and at several other Sylvaine farces of similar pattern.

Mr. Sylvaine was a soldier in the last war, has been an actor and started out as a serious dramatist. London did not take to his dramas, but as soon as he began writing farce they acclaimed him generously.

I have no idea what has happened to this particular Sylvaine farce since it fell into the hands of various American actors and promoters. Its helter skelter rowdiness suggests that it has been torn apart and patched together a half dozen times.

What Ho, the Chase

There is nothing left of it except a string of plot on which Bounding Bobby hangs as many of the gags of his profession as he can recall and find room for.

It starts with the London business man who goes to the country to work with his sexy secretary. Follows with the comic partner who comes down to bring him the firm's ledger.

It includes pursuing wives, pursuing military, comic deserters, exposed lingerie, slamming doors, comic servants, strip-tease humor, bedroom humor, bathroom humor and, as noted, Bobby Clark.

If a two-star rating indicates a 40% entertainment, then B C is entitled to 30% of that. The others, including Reginald Denny, Lillian Bond and Cora Witherspoon, Gawd help her, work like beavers.

Even Harry Wagstaff Gribble in person was forced to play a role last night to replace Eustace Wyatt, who was ill. H. G. wasn't very happy about it, but his performance was as good as his direction, which was, as you might say, unfettered.

There was a lot of laughter, and a nice solid setting by Franklin Fox.

'ALL MEN ARE ALIKE'

A farce in two acts by Vernon Sylvaine; directed by Harry Wagstaff Gribble; setting by Frederick Fox; presented at the Hudson Theater on October 6, 1941, by Lee Ephraim. The cast:

Sydney Butch	Harry Wagstaff Gribble
Mrs. Featherstone	Ethel Morrison
Major Gaunt	A. P. Kaye
Collins	Stapleton Kent
Alfred Bandle	Reginald Denny
MacFarlane	Ian Martin
Wilmer Popday	Bobby Clark
Frankie Marriott	Lillian Bond
Miss Trellow	Mary Newnham-Davis
Albert Butch	Milton Karol
Olga	Jeraldine Dvorak
Constable	William Valentine
Cyrano DeVean	Rolfe Sedan
Thelma Bandle	Cora Witherspoon
Elizabeth Popday	Velma Royton

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *October 7, 1941*

Bobby Clark Hilarious in All Men Are Alike

By JOHN MASON BROWN

MOST assuredly Bobby Clark is one of the funniest of the world's funny men. Throw him a fraction of a joke and he can fetch a full-grown laugh. He can even retrieve bits of humor when none have been tossed his way.

He is more than a clown; he is a circus in himself. Even a circus, however, needs something to hold up the Big Tent if it is going to give a show. Last night at the Hudson Mr. Clark and the rest of us were out of luck. Although he himself was putting on, in three rings at once, one of the most hilarious tanbark performances of our time, the Big Tent refused to stay up. Right in the middle of his drollest antics, it kept crashing down not only on our heads but on Mr. Clark. That the tent in question was a farce by Vernon Sylvaine, called All Men Are All Alike, did not prevent it from causing cruel damage in its constant moments of collapse. It may not have had far to fall but as it kept obeying the law of gravity, the results were sickening thuds.

Mr. Clark has deserted the musical comedy stage before. He has even scraped the dust off a classic. His Ben, the rough-spoken sailor in the Players Club revival of Love For Love was one of the most convulsing bits of horseplay our modern stage has seen. Mr. Clark managed to give Congreve's high comedy a blood transfusion from the music halls which it long has been needing. But Mr. Sylvaine is not Congreve. And, although Mr. Clark works harder for him than he did for a master, there is nothing he can do to save Mr. Sylvaine's script from itself.

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Mr. Sylvaine's idea of fun is as subtle as a burst boiler. He goes in for nonsense like a herd of elephants. Confusion is his notion of a plot. When he is through telling his tangled story the result does not seem like knitting dropped on the floor. It resembles telephone wires blown down in a hurricane.

Mr. Sylvaine's English country home in All Men Are Alike is a madhouse. To it troop strange ladies, husbands who get involved with them, their wives who jump unnaturally at natural conclusions, and an insane conglomeration of English soldiers and spy-chasers.

When it comes to his dialog, Mr. Sylvaine is no calmer. He appears to think good nonsense means only an absence of sense. He never tires of silliness, no matter how tiring it may be. He is quite an over-conscientious leerer, too. But most of his jokes fall as flat as the unfilled balloons that they truly are.

The perfect tribute to Bobby Clark is that he manages to be as uproarious at the Hudson as he occasionally is—in spite of Mr. Sylvaine's farce. Reginald Denny huffs and puffs without blowing the house down with laughter as the other harassed husband. And the rest of the cast ranges from bad to worse. But Mr. Clark has his superb moments, especially in the first of the evening's two acts before the whole affair has died as thoroughly as it does, even on him.

• • •

Mr. Clark works like a demon but with an angel's invention. He is lost in his quieter moments, as who would not be when knee-deep in such trash. In action, however, Mr. Clark is different; at moments wonderfully different. Mr. Clark doing a good old burlesque handshake; Mr. Clark imitating the vocal gargilings of an English officer; Mr. Clark in his long underwear or kicking his kilts out in back; Mr. Clark sipping coffee when wrapped up in a rug like a "vertical turtle"; or Mr. Clark rolling his blue eyes and suddenly becoming "dramatic"—all of these are memories to treasure. Yet even these cannot hide the sorry fact that the aforesaid Mr. Clark is being compelled to struggle through most of the evening like a bubble dancer who, instead of carrying her bubble, has been handed a piece of Limburger cheese.

All Men Alike? Nonsense and libel! There is only one Bobby Clark, and that is not enough, even though one such farce as Mr. Sylvaine's is far, far too much.